

Series: Ephesians  
Title: He Also Descended First  
Text: Ephesians 4: 9  
Date: April 6, 2014  
Place: SGBC, New Jersey

In Ephesians 4, using the apostle Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ is teaching you and I—who are members of his body, his church—to endeavor to keep unity with each other in the bond of peace, which Christ has given us through the Holy Spirit. He reminds us we are one but that we differ in gifts of grace which Christ measures out as he will. When speaking of Christ giving gifts, the apostle quoted Psalm 68.

**Ephesians 4: 8: Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.**

Then he says something in the parenthesis about Christ's ascension.

**Ephesians 4: 9: (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)**

**Proposition:** With God the way up is first down.

**Title:** He Also Descended First

**I. FIRST, WHO DESCENDED?—Ephesians 1: 9: (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)**

This one who came down is God, the Son, equal with God.

Philippians 2: 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

Christ Jesus is the great God.

Titus 2: 13: Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:3: Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,

He is the Maker of all things.

John 1: 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2: The same was in the beginning with God. 3: All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Christ is God over all.

Romans 9: 5:...as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Will God dwell on earth? God, the Word, the Maker of all things, who is over all, God blessed forever, who dwells in the highest heavens; will he dwell on the earth? Yes, he did. It was proposed to him in the eternal council and covenant of peace, that he should assume our nature, and dwell upon earth with mortal men: he agreed to it, and in the fullness of time, said, “Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God.” (Ps 60: 7)

## **II. SECONDLY, WE ARE TOLD HOW FAR GOD OUR SAVIOR DESCENDED—Ephesians 4: 9: he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?**

First, let me tell you what this does not mean. It is not what the Papists say. They say Christ descended into a place they describe as limbo between death and hell. They say the saints of old went to such a place after they died and waited there until Christ came; they say Christ went there to deliver them out of that place. Thus they say they are “the captivity he led captive.” No! No such place of limbo exists. Saints of old were made righteous in Christ who stood as their Surety. The penitent thief went to paradise—heaven—in spirit that day he died, the same as Christ did in Spirit. Likewise, every believer goes to glory in spirit, with Christ, as soon as they die. (Ecclesiastes 12: 7) Nor does it mean that Christ descended, locally, into the place called hell.

“The lower parts of the earth” refers to the whole of Christ’s humiliation on earth.

First, the Son of God descended “lower than the angels”

Hebrews 2: 9: But we see Jesus, who was made **a little lower than the angels** for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every *man*. [who Christ represented and redeemed by his own blood]

Further, the Son of God descended into the womb of the virgin, where he became flesh, one with his people.

Psalm 139: 13: For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. 14: I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. 15: My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16: Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there* was none of them.

He came, as he himself said, “to seek and save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) That means lost sinners, lost in Adam, so lost that they could never find the way to heaven. He came to save sinners, even the worst and chief of sinners. This is the glory of the gospel, the fullness, the marrow of it:

2 Timothy 1: 15: This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am the chief.

Our God, became a Man that he might be our near kinsman. He dwelt among us, in our flesh, in order to redeem us from sin, from satan, and from the curse of the law. This was his errand into the world.

Also it means, he spent his life in the lower parts of the earth. His very spirit while he dwelt here was a dissension into the lower parts:

Philippians 2: 7: But made himself of no reputation,...

John 1: 10: He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

Imagine that! God who made us, dwelt among us, and due to our blindness in sin, we did not even recognize him.

His life was attended with the greatest poverty, difficulties and sorrows. Christ spent his life upon earth in much poverty. He was born of poor parents and brought up in poverty. When he entered into his public ministry, he had “not where to lay his head.” (Mt 8:20). How amazing is this! This is the same one who said, “If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.” (Ps 50: 12)

He descended into the lower parts of the earth in this regard, “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mt 20: 28)

Philippians 2: 7: [he] took upon him the form of a servant,

Luke 22:27: For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

Was there ever a more broken and contrite heart than our Savior as he served his Father? He is meek and lowly in heart. As he served sinners like us, he spent his life upon earth, attended with great affliction. He was a man of sorrows from his cradle to his cross. Christ endured temptations from satan, from his own disciples, and from the Jews, according to that prophecy, “Who shall declare his generation?” (Is 53:8); His generation, in which he lived among on earth, treated him in a most barbaric and cruel way which finally resulted in the shameful and painful death of the cross. All this he underwent to work out our salvation. How amazing is this!

Then he descended even lower, when he was made sin for his people.

2 Corinthians 5: 21:...he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 3:13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

Then on the cross, Christ went lower when he bore the equivalent of hell when he cried out,

Psalms 22:1: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

He bore the wrath of God in place of his people to satisfy justice and save his people from our sins.

Then our Savior’s body literally went into lower parts of the earth, when his body lay in the tomb—or as he said, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Mt 12: 40)

So we see that our Lord and Savior descended into the lower parts of the earth. His whole life and minister on this earth was one of descending into the lower parts of the earth.

**III. THIRDLY, LET’S STAY WITH THE CONTEXT AND SEE WHY THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS TO US, Ephesians 4: 9: (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)**

In verse 8, he says Christ “ascended up on high.” None ever ascended to the great glory that God our Father has given to our triumphant Redeemer.

Everyone wants to ascend up on high: in this life, in the life to come; in their secular profession and in their religious profession. No one wants to go into the lower parts of the earth. Everyone wants to be up on high in every regard: in accomplishments, amongst friends, amongst brethren in the church. We can become real snobs about things like food, music, clothing, being the first to know something! Secretly, every one of us wants to be recognized as out—“doing”—the next fellow. And all want to go to heaven when we die. But sinners want to do all this with our chests poked out, riding high, and exalted by everyone because of our merit and our goodness.

Yet, as quickly as the Holy Spirit says, Christ ascended, he says, “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” (Eph 4: 9) Before Christ ascended, he descended, low, lower, lower, lower! Before Christ went up, Christ came down! With God, the way up is first to come down.

This is important because the Holy Spirit is teaching believers to walk, verse 2, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” So he tells us Christ “also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?”

Remember Naaman the Leper? He was a proud man. He thought he was a king that just happened to be a leper. But he was a leper that just happened to be a king. He came to Elisha’ the prophets house full of pride, with his horses and chariot, with all his valuable gifts but HE STOPPED AT THE DOOR. Some of you have come here today but you have stopped short of Christ the Door!

2 Kings 5: 10: And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. 11: But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to ME, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 12: *Are* not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman was not about to come down, especially not into that despised and rejected Jordan River.

2 Kings 5: 13: And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, *if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it*? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

Application: Sinner, if I preached to you and said that Christ bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it already? How much rather than when he says, “Descend! Come down! Christ said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Mt 11: 28-29)

2 Kings 5: 14: Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. 15: And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.

Sinner, the way up with God is down! Christ first descended in order to save his people from our sins. Now, Christ says to you, come down off your high horse. Be honest like a child. Confess your sins and he is faithful and just to forgive you your sins. Believe on him and he will save you.

Believer, this word is specifically for us. Remember when the disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Christ said, “he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.” (Lu 9: 48) Christ became the least. He descended into the lower parts of the earth—for the purpose of glorifying God and saving his people from our sins—the very least. Then, only then, after having accomplished the will of the Father, did Christ ascend to the great glory given our triumphant Redeemer—preeminent in all things!

So the Spirit applies it to us through Paul. Here is the will of the Father for you and I who believe on Christ.

Ephesians 4: 1: I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2: With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 2: 1: If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2: Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. 3: *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4: Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; 11: And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

By Christ descending he highly glorified God, justified his people, declared God the Justifier, honored God’s law, established the law for his people and defeated satan, sin, and death for his people!

This was not accomplished by pride! Satan loves pride. He is the father of pride. Satan was defeated by descending, humility, by lowliness and meekness, by longsuffering, by forbearance and love, by mercy and righteousness. By Christ descending into the lower parts of the earth he defeated all our enemies, brought in everlasting righteousness and redeemed all God’s elect. He highly exalted God by descending. Wherefore God also highly exalted him. The way up with God is first descending. So God says to you and I, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, [under Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior] that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” (1 Pet 5: 6-7) Believer, with God the way up is first down!

**Ephesians 4: 9: (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?...**

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**Amen!**